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THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER

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SOCIAL LIFE IN GEOGRAPHY

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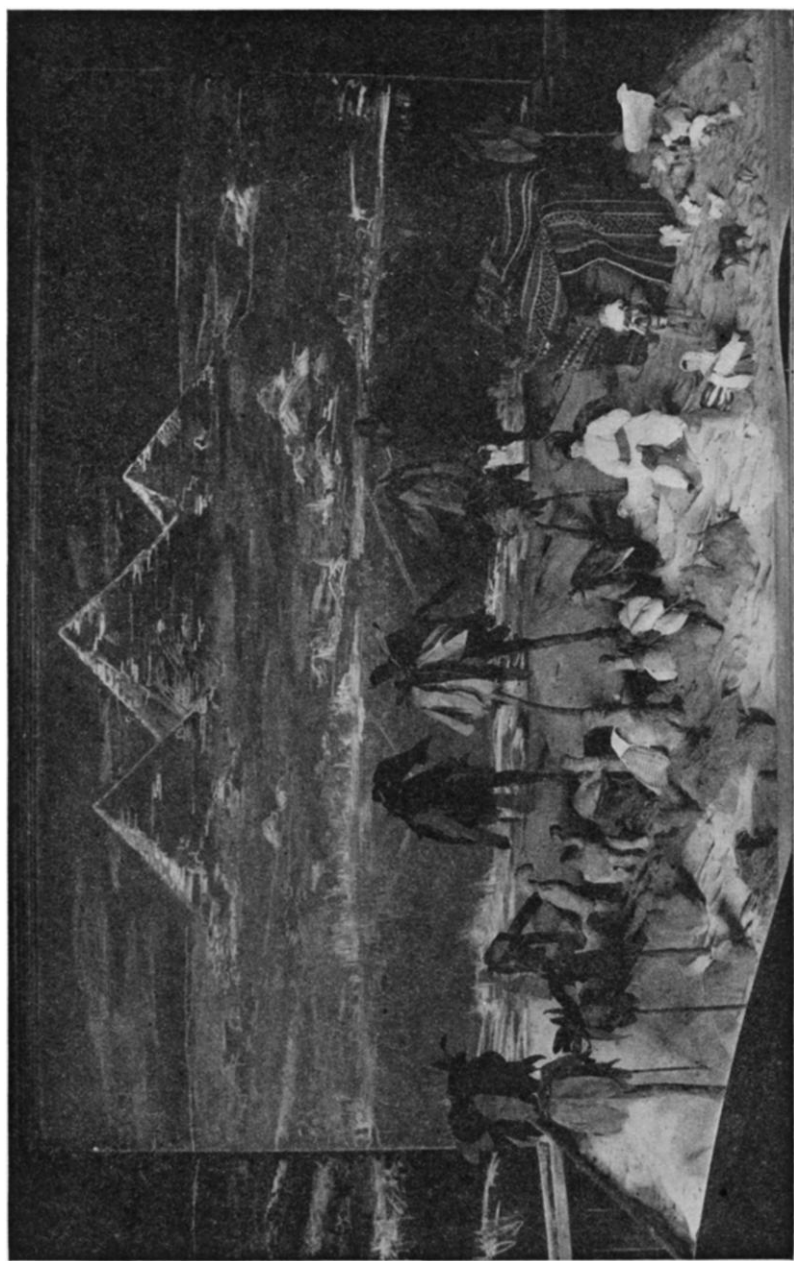
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The aim of education as stated by the greatest educators of our day is that of social efficiency. The educational method employed is that of more social life in the schoolroom. This social life as an educational means is begun in the kindergarten. It should be continued throughout the grades.

How does geography further this living of a real life in the schoolroom? This question leads us to ask several others. First, What is geography? Second, What are the aim and purposes of teaching geography? And third, What is the importance of geography in the curriculum if the aim of education is social efficiency?

Geography is defined as the relationship of things organic and inorganic. It involves some knowledge of geology, physics, zoölogy, botany, astronomy, and history, but it is only with relationships that the geography has to deal.

The aims and purposes of geography should be, first to show these relationships and man's control of his environment. Second, to broaden the child's horizon and develop the powers of perspective study. Third, to develop the power of scientific reasoning and observation. And fourth, to have the child able to question intelligently and weigh the evidences of newspaper and magazine articles as well as that of the text in geographical subjects. He should know his own environment and should have



THE HALTING OF A CARAVAN BESIDE THE NILE
Third-Grade Work. (See "Social Life in Geography")

some knowledge of the world as a whole and its relation to the people who inhabit it.

The importance of geography in the curriculum is manifold. I will mention only four reasons: First, the dependence of other subjects upon geography; second, the interdependence of man on man; third, the moral and social forces of the world as controlled by geographic conditions, and fourth, by far one of the most important, the broadening of the child's sympathies through a knowledge of the controls of social life widely different from his own.

In the grades of the elementary school man is the central feature of the geography work. With the children of the lower grades the curriculum leads from man in his social environment to the control of that environment. With the children of the upper grades it leads from the physiographic conditions to man's utilization and control. It is with the former that this paper will deal, and the emphasis will be placed on interrelationships.

When the child enters first grade from the kindergarten he has a rather clear idea of home life. He has studied the home of the smaller animals, of birds, as well as the home of the human family, at different seasons of the year. He has done this by observation, construction, excursion, and dramatization. He is now ready to understand and to enjoy the homes of children whose environment is far different from his own.

What boy of from six to ten does not enjoy playing Indian or being a Filipino? How he works to build a snow house in which he lives and labors in his childish efforts to be an Eskimo! This very playing at being a child of another land can be turned to excellent use in the schoolroom. By careful suggestion and direction from the teacher the children can be lead to dramatize the phases of Indian life which show their geographic controls. They can build the tepees, make and decorate their suits, their bows and arrows, their quivers, their clay pottery, and their basketry. They can have the bear hunt, and deer hunt, and the fishing scenes. Even the feast can be held at the return of the huntsmen. The agricultural methods of the Indians can be

carried out in the school garden and contrasted with our own agricultural methods.

The Eskimo home can be built in the school yard during the winter season. The children dressed in their warmest furs can live in this house for a few minutes, and, by so living, can more fully realize the necessity for the fur clothing of the little Eskimo baby. The children can make the few crude household utensils which these people have. They can make the harness for the dogs. If some child has a pet dog which can be harnessed to the ice sled, a ride around a snow hut will make Eskimo life more of a reality to him. Having led the children through these activities to understand some of the difficulties and hardships in the life of their little Eskimo brothers and sisters, they can now be lead to appreciate the effort of these people of the snow. They should learn how to get their food and what is to be obtained. They should also learn the necessity for eating the animal food, and the relationship of that necessity to the food supply of that cold climate. The children should feel the great advantage of their life and opportunity rather than to consider themselves a superior race.

As the hot months of summer come on a primitive village of Central Africa can be built in the place of the Eskimo village of the winter. This is easily done as the house needs only the four posts, covered with straw, and the sides and floor made of branches of leaves. Mats of braided leaves will serve as beds, and only some crude clay pottery is needed for household utensils. Although the children can only imitate the dress of the African native they will enjoy decorating themselves with shells and bright stones, and tying on the girdle. They will go to the make-believe forests to gather rubber. They will tramp round and round the school yard to carry this rubber to the place of shipment, and receive their reward for gathering their assigned quantity. While these are gathering rubber another squad of boys will return from the elephant hunt laden with ivory and other trophies. They, too, will give up their treasures to be sent to the civilized world. All this can be dramatized and much more. Then let the children follow by pictures and discussions the

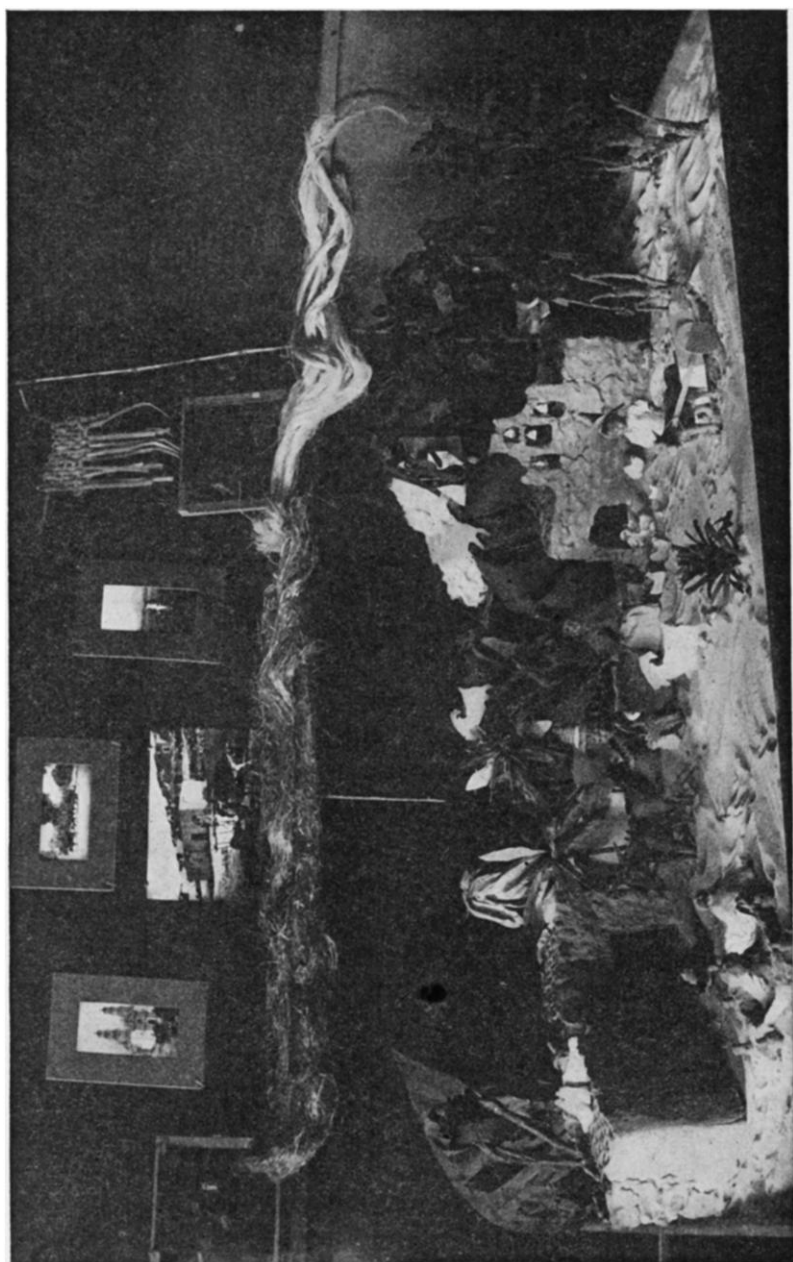
rubber as it leaves the hands of the African until it is on their own feet. By this means they will see the relationship of the savage life to ours and our obligation to them.

In many schools this outdoor work is not feasible; but in many far more can be accomplished than has even been suggested. When no open-air work is possible much can be done in the schoolroom. A corner of the schoolroom can be transformed into another country and the geography lessons each day lived instead of recited. The children will be able to bring many articles brought from foreign lands to equip this miniature country. Many children will construct wondrous things, and frequently the mothers will co-operate in this work.

The sand board should be used. I know, from practical experience, that we have not as yet begun to realize the value of the sand table in the schoolroom. When the country studied is less primitive, or the environment more complicated, the children should construct on the sand board the life of the country studied. They should dress the dolls, make the homes, contribute the animals from among their toys, gather the foliage, and obtain the covering for the board. They can make rivers and lakes, build mountains and even have a glacier or a smoking volcano whenever anyone of these are needed to emphasize the life of the people.

Last year, a fourth-grade class studied the life of Mexican children, illustrating each main feature on the sand board: the palm trees and cacti; the packed burros and the Mexican steer harnessed to the wide wooden-wheeled carts; the adobe houses with the public water fountains and the hacienda with its bells. The study of the palm leaf fiber and the hemp brought the children in touch with the industrial life of Mexico; and a knowledge of the great cathedral made them appreciate the religious life of our neighbors (see illustration on opposite page).

In one schoolroom, the children have constructed the rural life of Italy—its home life, its people, its vineyards, its irrigation ditches and the distant Mt. Vesuvius sending forth its puffs of smoke. This vineyard had row after row of vines, from which the pickers were gathering and carrying grapes to the preservers



MEXICO

and wine makers. Some of the boys had written letters to importers and had received samples of the products of the vineyards, accompanied by a pamphlet describing the process of curing and methods of importing.

At their homes several children have made themselves aprons, shawls, and kerchiefs, which they wore as they told the rest of the school how the Italian children worked in the vineyards. Another group of children showed me pictures they had found of these people in books of travel. Another group dramatized some of the quaint manners and customs of these children. One child told of their religious life. All were able to show on both globe and map the route which they would take from their own city, not only to Italy but to the vineyard country near Naples. Some of the boys could name railroads and steamship lines and state the price of tickets. This school had a large collection of Italian home-manufactured articles which the children had brought. They knew what Italy imported and exported; and discussed intelligently the interrelationships and interdependence of one country upon another.

As this phase of geography teaching draws to a close in the fourth or fifth grades, an excellent review is obtained by holding a conference of nations. The children should choose their own parts, and work them out. Each child should give from the globe or map of the world his journey, carefully planned as to route, expense, and time. Then they should dramatize the manners and customs, should set forth the needs and the advantages of their chosen country, its contributions to the world and to particular peoples, and the help or benefits it receives from these peoples. In fact, here again interrelationships should be emphasized. One of the best conferences of this sort I ever saw closed by the Japanese and Chinese serving tea in true oriental style. The children sat on bright crape paper rugs and drank their tea off tables made of cardboard covered with dark glazed paper to imitate the lacquered tables of the Orient. This method of review is vital and alive with social interest. It is not difficult to carry out such a programme.

Assign to each country a portion of the schoolroom wall, and leave the decorations to the children. They will find pictures, dress dolls, collect all sorts of specimens. Let them study pictures and arrange their own costumes. It might be well to tell them how much can be done with crape and tissue paper, and to limit expense if some children of well-to-do parents are apt to "show of." The construction work and costumes will be crude and unfinished. They are made quickly for effects and not for the purpose of manual training.

This work should be the spontaneous, initiative effort of the children, and not a play dramatized for spectators. I doubt if it is advisable to invite visitors at all. The presence of adults, unless they take an active part in the exercise, often creates in some child a strained consciousness of effort which thwarts the purpose of the lesson.

In carrying out any or all of this work the children should have access to a large number of children's books, to books of travel and to magazines. The older of these children should keep in touch with the daily papers and the progress made by all people. Their assignments should be individual or in small groups, and the subject-matter should appeal to the individual tastes of the children. Except for the geographical locations, main exports and imports and principal cities, etc., each child should be left free to absorb and assimilate that phase of life in any country which suits his temperament and purposes. These assignments may often be an excursion to some other part of the town to visit our immigrants and see how they live and to be able to compare what they see with the meager descriptions in the textbooks; or to some factory to see our process of manufacturing some article which in a foreign land is made by hand; or to see one of our bridges and its approach and compare with noted ones in Europe. All should gradually learn to see the physiographic controls.

Some pupils may write for railroad and steamship schedules and advertising matter; others may write to our large manufacturing establishments and corporations requesting educational series of their goods; and still others can open correspondence

with schools and institutions in foreign countries. Thus they will feel the real necessity of studying geography.

These are only a few of the ways by means of which more social life can be lived in the schoolroom. But these will develop in the child those habits of study and thought for which we aim. He will see and live relationships, his judgments will be based upon well-weighed evidences and his sympathies will embrace all people.